

ISLAMIC CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

(TRANSLATION OF "Bismillah Ki Barkat")

MA'EL KHAIRABADI

Translated by
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PREFACE

It's almost 12-13 years since I had been to my native place, Khairabad. On my visit, there I met a dear friend and his children. Among his children was a small girl. As soon as she saw me, she joined her hands and said 'namaste'. When her father stared at her sternly, she quickly said "assalaamu alaikum". Later, I learnt that the girl was studying at a school. This was about 12-13 years ago.

But now, with the influence of Hindi education in school, the ritual of joining hands and saying a Namaste has become a norm among Muslim children. They are slowly becoming distant from Islamic cultures and traditions. Instead of being exposed to our own religious customs, they are getting exposed to customs which are supported by 'shirk' folk tales.

Sensing this, I began a series under the title 'Hamaare buzurg' (Our Elders). After its completion, I began researching on Islamic culture and traditions, as a result of which Alhamdulillah; I am now ready to share the first part of the series in this book.

Those magical words, which are essential to be used in different situations, have been given the form of stories. It is an attempt to make children understand its importance and make them practice it in their day to day life. Thus, this book is enriching as well as entertaining.

It is a wonderful gift that parents can give their children, wherein they will learn several things through the different stories in this book. With a little effort, parents can help children understand the message contained in the stories, thereby helping in inculcating good values.

As an ordinary human being, I have done my bit to present things to the best of my abilities. Soon, the next series in Islamic values and cultures will be in your hands too. The attempt initiated needs your prayers for completion.



Ma'el Khairabadi

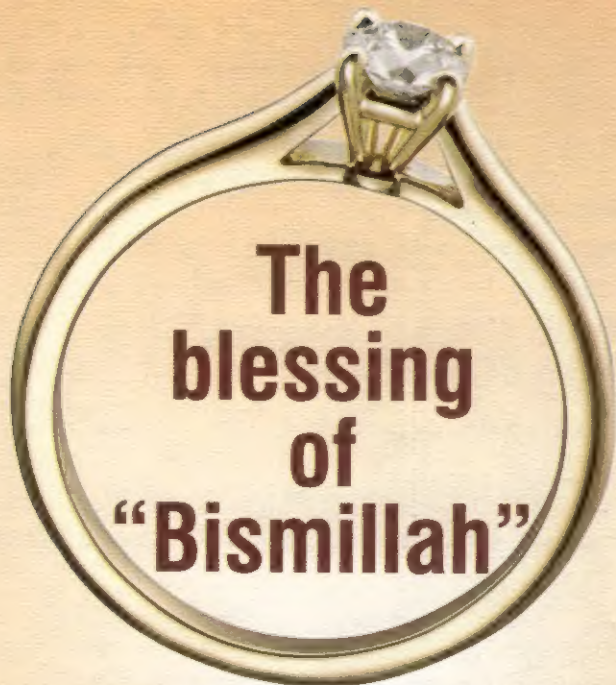
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

When Konkani Shanti Publications approached me with a proposal to translate the children's book series written by Janab Ma'el Khairabadi, it was an offer I couldn't refuse. And as I embarked on this journey, I realized that the stories of Janab Ma'el Khairabadi are easy to understand, educative as well as entertaining for young, impressionable minds. Of course, it was difficult to recreate his magic but nevertheless I have put in my best efforts and inshallah it serves its purpose. I would be happy to receive inputs and suggestions from readers for improvement in future writings. I take this opportunity to thank all the sisters associated with this project of translation and transliteration. Without their support and help it would have been difficult for me to complete this task. Above all, I thank Allah (SWT) for giving me this opportunity to serve His cause.

"May Allah bless this book, all the people associated with the publishing of the book, its readers and finally let it be source of peace to all the people of the world"

In Dedication to My late Abbaji (father) Iqbal Shah.

Shameem Khan, Mumbai



The blessing of “Bismillah”

“I cannot memorize this,” Sayeeda said with a great frustration as she kept her bag aside. Saffo baaji (elder sister) tried to persuade her to quickly complete her work, and then Ammi would come and tell them a story. But Sayeeda could not concentrate on her studies. Once she had kept the book in her bag, she did not remove it out again. When Ammi jaan came home, she asked, “Have you completed your studies?” When Saffo baaji complained to Ammi about Sayeeda, Ammijaan said, “If she does not start her studies by saying “Bismillah”, how will she memorise it?” and further explained, “my dear children, there is a lot of blessing in “Bismillah”. When we start a task by taking the name of Allah, then our heart is in it and the task gets completed.” there are several stories that are factual [real stories] and popular about “Bismillah”.

We all requested Ammi jaan to tell some stories to Sayeeda that will inspire her to learn valuable lessons from them.

Ammi jaan said, “Okay, listen” and began, “There was a Yahudi [Jew]. A Yahudi is the biggest enemy of Islam and Muslims. But it is Allah’s decision as to whom He chooses to make His followers. So, children,

this Yahudi had a small daughter. Once, she happened to hear the discourse of a Maulvi. The discourse was on the blessing of "Bismillah". So inspired was she with the discourse that she learnt to recite "Bismillah" and converted to Islam.

When she came home, she uttered "Bismillah" before she began doing any work. Before changing her clothes too, she uttered a "Bismillah". When her father heard her uttering "Bismillah" before doing everything, it angered him a lot and he asked her, "Why are you uttering "Bismillah"? Have you turned Muslim?"

The girl replied, "Yes I have become a Muslim."

Hearing this, he rebuked her and angrily left the house. He started thinking about ways to bring her back to his religion and thought of a plan.

He called out to her and gave her a ring. He told her to keep it safely and not to lose it. At that time, the girl was cleaning utensils. Saying "Bismillah", she took the ring and placed it on a stand used to hold an earthen pot, intending to wear it after finishing her work.

"I hope you are listening children." Ammi said and continued with her story:





He then called out to his daughter and gave her some money to fetch something from the market. She uttered "Bismillah" before taking the money and left for the market. Once she had gone, the father picked up the ring and hid it with him.

As soon as she came home, he ordered her, "Cook the food quickly. I have to eat and go out for some important work." The girl uttered "Bismillah" and began her cooking.

"And listen to me, Ammi jaan. Did she remember about the ring?" Sayeeda interrupted her mother's story-telling.

Ammi jaan said, "No, my child. In all this confusion, she forgot about the ring. She quickly cooked the meal and served it to her father. He ate and left. After some time, she suddenly remembered about the ring. She searched for it hastily, but did not find it at all. Now, she was worried. But, uttering 'Bismillah', she remained quiet.

The father took the ring, threw it in the river and came back home. Next day, he asked his daughter to bring the ring to him. She confessed that the ring was lost. He was very angry and said, "If you don't find the ring in three days, then I will beat you up." The girl did not say a thing. The father shouted at her and left the house. Wandering about, he reached the fish market. A big fish was

being auctioned there. People were bidding different prices and the Yahudi too joined the bidding. Finally, the bidding ended with the Yahudi's bid and he got the fish.

He took the fish and went home. He told his daughter to cook the fish and also keep searching for the ring. The girl uttered "Bismillah" and took the fish to cut, clean and cook it. As soon as she slit the stomach of the fish, a ring fell out of it. When the girl picked it up, she couldn't believe her eyes because it was her lost ring. She was overjoyed. Uttering "Bismillah," she quickly wore the ring..

After finishing his meal, the father again asked her for the ring. The girl quickly removed the ring from her finger and gave it to her father. He was shocked with disbelief.

Finishing the story, Ammi asked, "So, children did you understand how the ring came back?" and she herself answered, "You see, when the Yahudi went and dropped the ring into the river, the blessings of "Bismillah" made a fish swallow the ring and soon, a fisherman caught the same fish along with other fishes and brought it to the market to sell. Again, with the blessing of "Bismillah", the Yahudi purchased the same fish and brought it home."

My dear children ,this is the blessing of " Bismillah."

If you also begin all your work by uttering Bismillah, Allah will help you and all your work will be successfully completed.



ASSALAMU ALAIKUM



We had all decided that when Saddu comes home today, we would get him beaten up by Ammi. After all, he deserved a good beating after what he had done. It was shameful, the way he used bad words to shout aloud at Jalal while standing in the lane.

So, when mother came home, Saffu, Appiya, Sayeeda bi, Shaukat, Saffu baaji, Hamida apa and myself all complained to her about Saddu. Ammi jaan's face was red with anger. It seemed that after Saddu comes home today, he would surely get beaten up. But when he finally came home, and greeted everyone with 'Assalaamu Alaikum' and sat down in one corner, Ammijaan also greeted back with Wa Alaikum Assalam. We too replied back with 'Wa Alaikum Assalam'. Not just that, Ammi's anger had subsided too. She looked at Saddu but did not shout at him or beat him up. We all began to think 'let's see what happens now?' but nothing happened. Little Gullu couldn't take the suspense anymore and asked in her childlike dialect, "Ammi jaan, Chaddu bhaiya has come." Gullu meant that Saddu bhaiya had come home and now she should beat him. Ammi jaan understood and burst out laughing. She then said, "I would have beaten up Saddu but he greeted everyone by saying 'Assalaamu Alaikum' when he came in, which calmed my anger completely."

"But what about the bad words that he uttered"? Little Gullu asked. Saddu understood that Ammi jaan had received a complaint about him. Ammi jaan looked at him and said, "When I was as small as Saddu, one day my Abbu miyan



(father) got angry with me for some reason. He even wanted to beat me up. Suddenly, an idea struck me. I immediately said, "Abba jaan, Assalaamu Alaikum. Just as I greeted him with these words, Abba jaan's anger subsided immediately and he began to smile. The same thing has happened today. I wanted to beat Saddu but when he said 'Assalaamu Alaikum', my anger suddenly vanished."

"But how did your anger vanish?" asked Shaukat.

Ammi jaan replied, "Dear children, our beloved prophet (SAW) has said that when we greet each other by saying 'Assalaamu Alaikum', love is born. In other words, when we say Salaam to each other, the anger subsides on its own. Shall I tell you a story related to this?"

"Of course, of course Ammi jaan" we all said in chorus. Ammi jaan began telling us the story.

Once upon a time, there was a tailor who had his shop in the market. While going to his shop from his home, he always said salaam to man who was known as Nawab Sahab by everyone. Nawab Sahab was famous for his anger. He would always reply to the tailor's Salaam with 'Wa Alaikum Assalam', but there would be no further conversation.

This tailor had one enemy who had trapped him in a court case. The tailor was a poor man and couldn't bear the expenses of the court proceedings. Since he had no money to pay the lawyer's fees, he reached the court on his own without a lawyer. But on reaching the court, he saw that the town's most famous lawyer

was present there to plead his case. At every hearing, the tailor would come to the court and so would the lawyer from his side. The case went on for a long time. The tailor wondered how the lawyer turned up for each hearing without fail. On two or three occasions, he even told the lawyer that he did not have any money to pay him but the lawyer did not say a word in response. Finally, the tailor won the case and he was acquitted of all charges. The lawyer went his way.

“Oh, wonderful” we told Ammi jaan after hearing the story “The lawyer was indeed a nice man.”

Then we asked Ammi jaan “Is the story over?” Ammi jaan said, “No, now listen to the interesting part of the story.”

After being acquitted of the charges, the tailor was very happy. He went home, sold a few of his utensils and with the money invited his friends for a party to share his happiness with them.

Everyone was sitting and enjoying the meal. At that time, suddenly Nawab Sahab, the lawyer and the Nawab's accountant came to his house. The tailor became tense. They were not invited for the party but they had come unannounced and had even sat down to eat. They told the tailor, “Brother, you did not invite us, yet we came. Hope you didn't feel bad.”

The tailor replied, “Not at all, Sir. I am very happy. You are such esteemed people. I was not sure if you would want to come to a poor man's house. That's the reason for not inviting you over. Please forgive me. Now that you have come, please accept the dal-daliya that has been cooked for lunch. Please honour me by eating it.”

“Ammijaan, what is the meaning of accepting the meal?”

“It means to eat the food. Ok?”



Nawab Sahab ate two three morsels and then began to leave. He then signalled to his accountant who gave the tailor 5000 rupees. The tailor was dumbstruck. He could barely say, "Huzoor (Sir)"!

Nawab Sahab cut him short by saying, "You have to take this money. Otherwise you know about my famous anger."

Frightened, the tailor took the money and asked him, "Please let me know, why you have done this favour on me." Nawab Sahab replied to this, "Brother, you give me more than this every day."

"What? Me? What did I give to you, Sir?" The tailor was dumbfounded.

"Yes brother. You greet me every day with a salaam. Assalaamu Alaikum has great value to it. Do you know what it means? Assalaamu means Allah's protective hand remain on you- in this world and in the other world too. When in the other world, Allah calculates our deeds; your valuable greetings will also be counted. This gift has made me love you a lot and out of this love for you, I have come today to your house to share your happiness."

"Thank you Sir. Hope Allah blesses you immensely for this." Then Nawab Sahab left. Munimji then explained to the tailor that the lawyer was also sent by the Nawab Sahab to plead your case on a salary of 1000 rupees. All this was owing to your salaam.

With concluding the story Ammijaan told the children, "So you see, there is so much value to Salaam. Today, when Saddu greeted me with a salaam, all my anger subsided. When you too have a fight with someone, say Aassalaamu Alaikum among yourselves. This will create love in your hearts and remove the anger from your hearts."

"All right, Ammi jaan", we all said in unison and got into bed.



INSHA ALLAH

"I will solve this problem in a Jiffy

"I will stand first in the half yearly exams."

"This time, I want to stand first."

We all were sitting and talking among ourselves, when Ammi jaan walked in. She had overheard our conversation and as she came in she said, "Who is making big statements?". We all spoke to her about our desires.

"And what are you thinking about, Sayeeda?"

"What is the meaning of big statements, Ammi?" Sayeeda asked.

"It means to make arrogant and egoistic statements such as "I will do this" "today I will do that", "today I will make this dress", " Did you understand?"

"But listen to me, Ammi jaan" Saddu objected to mom's advice by saying, "You also say that I will go here and there today and do this and that today, etc."

Saddu said etc etc with such a vigorous jerk of his head that we all burst out laughing. He is so funny, indeed.

Ammijaan said that whenever she intended to do something and say it aloud with her tongue, she always added an 'Insha Allah' before it. By saying "Insha Allah", the work gets completed.

Saying "Insha Allah" is something that Allah taught his Prophets and the beloved Prophets passed it on to their followers. When we utter "Insha Allah", we receive Allah's support and the task can be completed with a lot of strength and vigour. You probably haven't heard the story of the farmer who's farm....."

"Tell us, tell us, Ammi jaan, tell us the story" we all said in agreement and she started recalling the story: "Listen children. Once upon a time, there was a farmer who had several farms. He had cultivated wheat in his farms. The plant started growing. Finally, the wheat seeds were ripe and the farmer went to inspect it. They were ready to be cut. Seeing his ready crop, the farmer said, "Tomorrow, I will bring the other people from the tribe and cut the fields."

"Ammi jaan! You mean cutting the fields or the crops in the field?" Saddu said.

"It's the same thing. Now, listen carefully to enjoy the story" Ammi told all of us and continued with the story.



In the field, one sparrow had laid some eggs. The eggs were just hatched. Since the mother sparrow was away, the little sparrows were terrified when they heard the farmer's words. The reason for their fear was that if the crops were cut down, where would they hide? They would surely be eaten up by some big bird.

When mother sparrow came, the little one's pleaded, "Mother, let's go away from here."

"Why, my little one's?" the mother sparrow asked

"The farmer had come to the fields today and was saying that tomorrow he will start cutting the crops in the field."

"Don't worry. The field will not be cut tomorrow."

When mom said this, the kids were a little relieved. The next day, mother sparrow again went out. The farmer came again and looking at the field said, "People from my tribe refused to come to help me cut the fields. So, I will hire some labourers today and will surely cut the fields tomorrow."

When the little sparrows heard this, they again got worried. In the evening when mother sparrow came over, the little sparrows said, "Mother, we must run away from here today. Tomorrow, he will surely bring the labourers and cut the fields down." Mother sparrow again said, "Don't worry. Tomorrow too, the fields will not be cut down."

With mother sparrows reassurance again, the little sparrows were relieved.



The third day, mother sparrow again went out of her nest. The farmer came to the field again and said aloud, "Today, all the labourers were busy with other tasks. No one is free. Tomorrow, I will "Insha Allah" come alone and start cutting the crops."

"Chun, chun, chun, hee, hee, hee..." the little sparrows said to each other, "This gentleman wants to cut the entire field by himself. It is not possible."

In the evening, when mother sparrow came home, she heard the little sparrows talking amongst themselves and asked them "Didn't the farmer come by today?"

"He had come, mother" all of them told her "And do you know what he said?"

"He said, "Insha Allah", tomorrow he will cut the entire field by himself. Mother, how can he cut this huge field without any help."

"Children, let's move away from here now. We will find another place to live tonight itself".

"Oh mother, you are frightened" asked the little ones.

"It is a matter of worry now" she replied

"Why?"

"Tomorrow the field will definitely be cut down."

"How is that possible? Can he cut the entire field all by himself?"

"Yes, he will be able to cut the entire field. Don't you remember him saying "Insha Allah."

"So, how does saying "Insha Allah" change things?"

"Allah's help comes in automatically. By saying " Insha Allah", motivation in a man is risen and he can start work on his own. Then Allah completes his task."

Saying this, the sparrow flew with her little ones towards the forest.

"Ammi jaan, is the story over?" asked everyone.

"Yes, it's almost over" she replied.

"But the fields....?"

"The next day, the farmer came with his equipments to cut the crops and began with his task. He worked very hard all day and could manage to cut down a lot of crops."

"Wonderful! From now on, we will also utter 'Insha Allah' before we start with some work."

"How will you say that?"

"Insha Allah, I will solve this problem quickly."

"Insha Allah, I will come first in the half yearly exams."

"Insha Allah, I will stand first this time."

"Insha Allah, I will eat sweets today."

This last statement was of Gullo Bi. We all smiled. Ammi jaan said, "From now, whatever work you take up, start doing it after saying "Insha Allah."

"Yes Ammi" all the children agreed.

"But listen. You haven't asked me the meaning of "Insha Allah"? It means 'If Allah wishes'".

"Yes Ammi. Only if Allah wishes, then we can complete all our work. If he doesn't wish, then how can we complete our work, isn't it Ammi?"

"Right! Now children, go to bed. And don't forget to say Insha Allah."

"Insha Allah" the children said together.

MASHA ALLAH



"How fine is my frock?"

"My jersey is of 1000 rupees."

"My dress is so flowery. It is the best."

"Wow, my woollen coat is warm. I paid Rs.800 as its stitching charges."

We were all speaking highly about our clothes and feeling a sense of pride in doing so. Just then, Ammi came in. She quickly said: "Dear children, say MashaAllah, MashaAllah."

"Why?" we all asked in unison.

"It is Allah's order. Our beloved Prophet (SAW) has taught us." Ammi jaan said.

It means 'What Allah has willed', meaning what He willed, he gave us. We wore what He willed for us to wear. It's all thanks to Him."

"Oh yes! Ammi jaan. You are right. It is He who gives us everything."

"Bravo children. And listen, if a man to whom Allah gives, does not thank Him, then Allah ta'ala snatches from him the favour that He had bestowed upon him."

"Ammi jaan. How does he do that?"

"The thing can get lost, or stolen. Haven't you heard of that story?" "Which story, Ammi jaan?"



"The one which is in the Holy Quran?"

"Completely true?"

"Yes."

"Then tell us."

"Listen, there were two men. They were both neighbours. One had a garden. It was in full bloom. Within a year, the garden was full of fruit laden trees. When each tree was ready to bear juicy fruits, the owner of the garden told his neighbour, "Look, how my garden is blooming with fruits."

The neighbour advised, "Congrats brother! At least say "MashaAllah". Thank the Almighty."

"Oh, come on" the garden owner brushed aside his advice arrogantly.

"Oh Ammi jaan!.." We all said with a surprised look.

"He's such a bad man. Allah Almighty gave him the garden and he forgot Him!"

"Listen to what happened after this" Ammi jaan said and continued with the story.

The same day, lightning struck the garden and the entire garden was completely destroyed.

"Then he must have regretted a lot" We all asked Ammi jaan.

She quickly replied, "But what was the use of regretting now?"

"So Ammi jaan, we will definitely say "MashaAllah" from now."

"Wonderful! When you say that someone is healthy, say "

MashaAllah" with it. If you see something you like, say "MashaAllah". Like this Munna bhaiya (brother), he is so plump and healthy, "MashaAllah". His cheeks are "MashaAllah" so full. So, when you see him, say "MashaAllah" my Munna is very healthy.

There is one more benefit of saying "MashaAllah."

"What is that, Ammi jaan?"

"That is, it will not come under the evil eye...understood?"

"This is true, a free medicine for evil eye."

"So, how will you say it?"

"Listen Ammi. Like this,"MashaAllah", my frock is very beautiful."

"MashaAllah", my dress is lovely."

"MashaAllah."



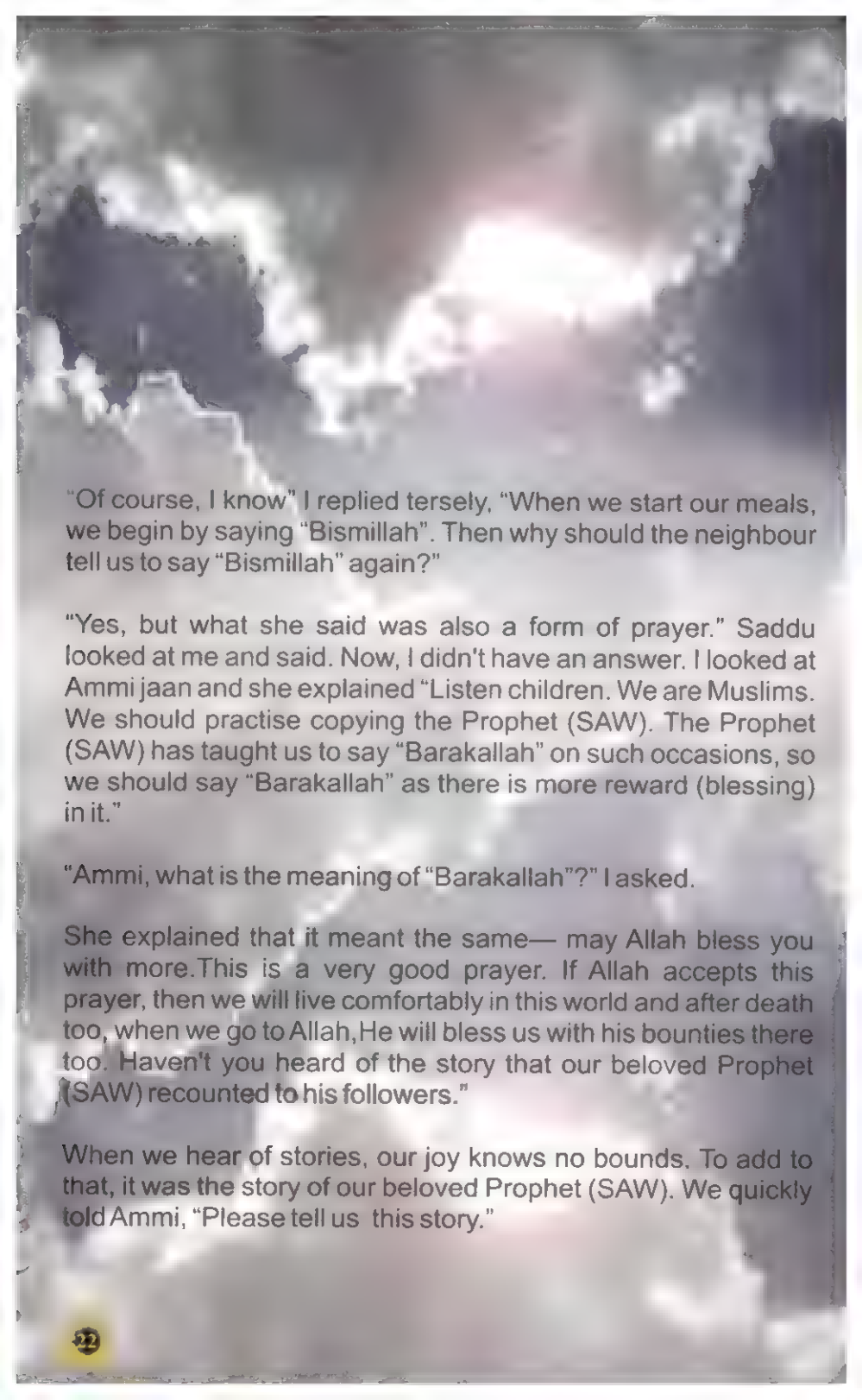
BARAKALLAH

I have observed on many occasions that my mother's method of teaching is different from other ladies. When I asked Abbu miyan (father) and also Maulvi Saab (one who teaches the Holy Quran), I learnt that my mother's method was right. Now, I have understood that whatever my mother tells us, teaches us and also practises herself is right. For instance, there was this episode that happened yesterday. We were eating our meal, when our neighbour walked into our house. Looking at her, Ammi requested her, "Come sister. Join us for lunch." She replied, "Say Bismillah, Allah will give you more."

'Say Bismillah, Allah will give you more' Hearing this phrase, we started thinking that whenever anyone invited Ammi jaan over meals, she always said "Barakallah". No one said anything at that time, but when Ammi jaan sat down to tell us stories, Saddu broached the topic "When we were eating our food, and our neighbour walked in, you invited her to join us and she said, 'Say "Bismillah", Allah will give you more'. But instead of saying this, you always say "Barakallah". Which of this is right?"

When Saddu said this, I quickly intervened, "Our Ammi is right."

"How do you know?" Saddu shot back, "Are you a Maulvi?"



"Of course, I know" I replied tersely, "When we start our meals, we begin by saying "Bismillah". Then why should the neighbour tell us to say "Bismillah" again?"

"Yes, but what she said was also a form of prayer." Saddu looked at me and said. Now, I didn't have an answer. I looked at Ammi jaan and she explained "Listen children. We are Muslims. We should practise copying the Prophet (SAW). The Prophet (SAW) has taught us to say "Barakallah" on such occasions, so we should say "Barakallah" as there is more reward (blessing) in it."

"Ammi, what is the meaning of "Barakallah"?" I asked.

She explained that it meant the same— may Allah bless you with more. This is a very good prayer. If Allah accepts this prayer, then we will live comfortably in this world and after death too, when we go to Allah, He will bless us with his bounties there too. Haven't you heard of the story that our beloved Prophet (SAW) recounted to his followers."

When we hear of stories, our joy knows no bounds. To add to that, it was the story of our beloved Prophet (SAW). We quickly told Ammi, "Please tell us this story."



She began, "Once upon a time, there was a blind man, a bald man and a leper. Once, Allah ta'ala put them through a test. He sent a Farishta (angel)?"

"Farishta?" We all asked together. Farishta was the angel who would come to our beloved Prophet (SAW).

"Yes children. The Farishta who would bring Allah's messages to the prophet (SAW). Also, the Prophet knew about the Farishta's coming. But this Farishta who approached the three had taken the form of a human being, so that they didn't recognise him."

In human form, he first came to the bald man and asked him about his wish. The bald man expressed his desire to have nice, lustrous hair on his head. The Farishta moved his hand on his head. Lo! His baldness had disappeared. Then he gave him a goat and said "Barakallah"— may Allah bless you with His bounty.

After that, he went to the blind man and asked him his heart's desire. The blind man replied that he wished to get his eye sight back. The Farishta moved his hand on his face and Lo! His eyesight was back. Then he gave him a cow and said "Barakallah"— may Allah bless you with His bounty.

Then he went to the leper and asked him his heart's desire. To this, he replied that he wanted to be free of the disease. The Farishta moved his hand over his body and the man was hale and hearty. His body had a nice, beautiful skin. He gave him a she-camel and said "Barakallah"— may Allah bless you with His bounty.

After giving the prayer of bounty, the Farishta went away. The bald man's sheep gave birth to baby goats. The blind man's cow gave birth to calves



and the leper's camel gave birth to young calves too.

In some time, these young one's grew older and had their little ones too. After three to four years, all three men had several animals and were prosperous.

"Now listen! children. Listen carefully." Ammi continued with the story.

The Farishta came back. He went to the bald man and pleaded, "I am very worried. I am a homeless person [vagabond]. Allah has given you a lot. Give me something out of that."

The bald man gave a curt reply, "Run away from here. I have raised these animals with a lot of hardship. I will not give you a single goat. Go away from here and find yourself another door to beg."

The Farishta replied, "You were bald. Allah gave you fine hair and also blessed you with His blessing of bounty with which the number of your goats increased. Now you have forgotten the Almighty.

Listen, I am the one who cured your baldness and even gave you the goats. You have failed the test of Allah. Now He will bring you to your original state."

As soon as the Farishta uttered these words, the man became bald again and all his animals died instantly.

"Bad, bad. The bald man was so thankless" we all said in chorus. Ammi continued with her story.

The Farishta then went to the blind man and asked for a cow. He also spoke in a 'thankless' tone. The Farishta cursed him too. The blind man who had regained his sight lost it again. All his animals too died.

"Bad, bad, the blind man was also not good." We all said.

The Farishta then went to the leper and told him the same story and asked for help. The leper replied, "Brother. Earlier I was inflicted with leprosy. Allah gave me good health. He gave me a she camel and now my house is very prosperous owing to the blessed animal. Brother, you are asking for help in the name of Allah. You may take what you want."

The Farishta blessed him and left.

"Ammi, he was a good man" we all said happily. Ammi replied to this, "So, when you grow up, be good to people of the Lord. Who knows, which of Allah's followers might approach us in which form? It could be that a Farishta blesses you and your house is flooded with prosperity."

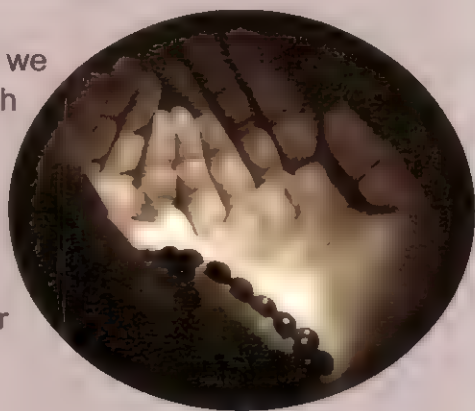
"Insha Allah" we all said together "We will help everyone, whether we know them or not."

"And listen, pray for each other for the blessing of bounty. Keep saying 'Barakallah' Ammi reminded us.

We all replied, "Insha Allah, we will keep praying for each other's prosperity."

"Wonderful! Now, you all go to sleep."

On this, we all got up from our seats and went to our beds.



JAZAKALLAH



First, listen to this joke. After this, you will see how Ammi teaches us Islamic culture and traditions. She tells us how we must speak, meet, talk to others, sit, move, eat, drink and how to live a good life in the context of Islam.

Yesterday, when Ammi was telling us stories, our neighbour brought a gift. It was a hot snack of corn kernels. Ammi always told us that even if the gift is ordinary, we must never refuse it. According to our beloved Prophets Hadeeth's, "Even if the gift is bakri ka khur (goat's hoof), accept it."

So, Ammi happily accepted the gift and uttered "Jazakallah".

Ammijaan even complimented her by calling the gift deliciously hot and irresistible to eat. She again said a 'Jazakallah' to her when she left the house.

The next day, the neighbour again brought hot corn kernels for us.

Ammi again said "Jazakallah" and took them from her. The third day also the same thing was repeated. But this time, Ammi asked her, "My kind neighbour, why do you give these corn kernels to us every day?"

The neighbour replied, "You only say Ja Ja Kal la (Go go, bring tomorrow). So I bring it every day."

"When did I say that?" Ammi asked.

"Today too, you said ja ja Kal la" she replied.

Now Ammi jaan was left wondering. We were all sitting and listening to the conversation. We were also wondering when

Ammi said 'ja ja kal la' when suddenly Saddu stood up and said, "Ammi jaan, I have understood. Shall I tell?"

He continued, "You say Jazakallah on getting the snack and our neighbour is misunderstanding it as 'ja ja kal la'. In our school, 'z' is pronounced as 'j' and mazza is pronounced as majaa (fun). Qazi (religious scholar) is called as Qaji. Raazi (affirm) is pronounced as raaji. Mazboot (strong) is majboot and ijaazat (permission) is pronounced as ijaajat. These are zamana (times) of Hindi literature" he stopped to laugh by stressing on jamana purposely. So, if "Jazakallah" is misunderstood as ja ja kal la, it is not surprising."

Ammi understood and so did we. She complimented Saddu on his intelligence. She then turned to the neighbour and invited her to take a seat while she explained to her the meaning of "Jazakallah".

She then started to explain its meaning. We too began to hear enthusiastically. We were also happy within our hearts that Ammi takes care to correct our language usage when we go wrong. Just day before yesterday Sayeed miyan came from somewhere and pronounced a word in an incorrect manner. He told Ammi, 'Zaldi (Quickly), I have to go back.'

The same minute, he was pulled up and told to repeat it correctly 'Jaldi' several times and warned not to use the wrong word again. Now coming back to "Jazakallah", Ammi explained its meaning, "Listen sister. Your gift giving is a good thing. Our beloved Prophet (SAW) has said that give gifts to each other, it increases love between people and old disputes are resolved. Even if the gift is ordinary, it must be accepted."



As Ammi was saying this, the neighbour was listening to her curiously, nodding her head and feeling happy. Sometimes she would say, "You are right sister. Huzoor (SAW) has taught us good methods of living life."

"Yes and now listen to this" Ammi continued "The meaning of 'Jazakallah' is that 'may Allah give back good in return'. It is a wonderful blessing. Did you understand? Its meaning is that Allah gives you good things in Jannah (Heaven)."

Hearing this, wonder what mischief came to Saddu's mind? He suddenly started saying, "Thank you. Very good. Dhanya ho (bless you)." We all burst out laughing. Ammi jaan also smiled and asked, "What's the joke?"

"Ammi jaan, it is not a joke. In our school, our science teacher Miss Fish says a thank you on such occasions and Pandit Sundar Lalji says dhanya ho. These words also mean the same" Saddu replied.

Ammi said, "The meaning is the same. Now listen to what I say.

Whenever, mutton was cooked at our beloved Prophet (SAW), he would say, "Increase the quantity of the gravy and share it with the neighbours. If someone gifted Him something, the Prophet (SAW) would accept it happily and say "Jazakallah". He would bless them and teach everyone around him that whenever anyone gave them a gift always say "Jazakallah."

We kept on listening. When Ammi finished the story, all of us uttered the same thing "Ammijaan, Jazakallah". Allah will give you good in return. You give us such good teachings."

The neighbour also got up from her seat, said "Jazakallah" to Ammi and went to her house.

Now, whenever anyone gives us anything, we don't forget to say "Jazakallah". Allah, grant everyone the ability to utter this word without fail and also give them a wonderful mother like ours.



ALHAMDULILLAH

One day, Ammi served us our dinner before Maghrib (evening). After having our dinner, we read our Maghrib salah (evening prayers). After that, Saddu called out to us, enticing us with a story telling session.

But however tough the tasks she may be engaged in, Ammi's ears were always glued to our conversations. There were times when we would be engaged in our story sessions, and when one of our stories were over, Ammi would walk in and say, 'there is still more to the story'. Then she would add such wonderful elements to the story that it turned out to be more enjoyable than usual. Now, Ammi jaan was busy in her work and Saddu was telling us a story. Probably you must have already heard this story: "There was once a king...but Our king is the Almighty" Saddu started saying rolling his eyes and rubbing his hands together. In olden times, this was the way to begin recounting stories. And it is the truth. Ammi always told us that our real king is the Almighty Allah.

But there was this king who had a minister. This minister was very wise, virtuous, a namaazi (one who performs all obligatory salah) and one who fasted religiously. He gave good advice to the king. He was in the habit of always saying "Alhamdulillah" (meaning Thanks to Allah, It's by the favour of Allah). There were times when while just sitting alone, he would suddenly say

"Alhamdulillah". Probably, he would remember some favour of Allah).

Saddu is such a copycat. While recounting a story, Ammi would often use her eyes and hands to convey things. At this point, Saddu suddenly jerked his head and repeated dramatically, "He must have remembered some favour of Allah"

One day; an Indian trader reached the kingdom. He traded in swords. In olden times, Indian swords were very popular. The king asked the trader to show him some good Indian swords. The trader began showing him one sword after another while describing each one "This is Resham kaat, this is atoot, and this is laplap." The king had never heard the names of laplap sword and kapkapi sword. So he asked the trader to show him some special features of these swords. The trader opened a box. Inside the box, the sword was folded in the manner of a string. The trader held its handle and pressed a button underneath it. With this, the sword came out with a shrill sound. Now, in his hand was a laplap sword.

The king now commanded him to close the sword. The trader again pressed the button and the sword came back to its original size. The king was highly impressed. He took the sword in his hand and pressed the button. The sword opened in its magnificent form. The king started inspecting its sharpness with his other hand. Just then, in a careless moment, the king again pressed the button. With great speed, the sword came back to its original size but in the process, the finger with which he was inspecting its sharpness got cut and thrown in one corner. In utter pain, the king uttered 'Uff, Allah!' (Oh, Allah!) While the minister said 'Alhamdulillah'.

We were all interested in Saddu's story. He continued saying, "Now brothers, hearing his minister say "Alhamdulillah", the king was livid. He reprimanded him by saying, "What is Allah's favour in this? What is there to thank Him? You say "Alhamdulillah" without any valid reason." In his anger, he commanded that all his possessions be taken away from him and he be banished

from the city.

So, the minister was thrown out from his own hometown. All his personal belongings from his house were forcefully taken away. One day, after the minister left the city, the king went hunting. He saw a deer in the jungle. He started chasing the deer on his horse and did not realise when he had gone too deep into the jungle. The deer had hidden behind the bushes. The king was tired searching for it and got down from his horse to rest. He fell fast asleep under a tree.

There were some people who lived in the jungle. When they spotted the king sleeping under the tree, they put a blanket on him and kidnapped him. They then took him to the leader of their clan. The tribal clan wanted to sacrifice a human being to its deity.

Suddenly, their gaze fell on the king's cut finger. They couldn't sacrifice him as they needed a man without the absence of any body part.

Eventually, the king was let free. When the king returned to his kingdom, he thought over the incident and realised that it was this cut finger that had saved his life. So, the minister's uttering of "Alhamdulillah" was right.

When the story reached till here, Saddu said, "Story is over". Just then, Ammi jaan intervened and said, "The story is not over. It is still incomplete".

We kept on thinking what remained to be told in the story. Saddu said, "Ammi, please complete the story."

Ammi jaan said, "When the king came back, he called the minister. After offering him a seat with respect, he said, 'I have understood that my cut finger saved my life, "Alhamdulillah". But in these days, the hardships that you faced, how has that been Allah's favour?"

The minister replied, "Your highness, it is Allah's favour that I was not present with you on your hunting expedition. I would have not left your side. In that case, both of us would have been caught and I would be trapped. Since my eyes, ears, hands, nose and all body parts are intact, they would have sacrificed me. It is thanks to Allah that before this could happen you threw me out of the city."

The king was happy to hear the answer. Everyone in the king's durbar started chanting "Alhamdulillah, Alhamdulillah".

"So children, all the teachings taught by our beloved Prophet (SAW) is valuable. You too must keep saying "Alhamdulillah" in every situation. Understood?"

"Yes." All of us said in unison. In our hearts, we kept admiring Ammi jaan's wisdom. She always adds something enriching and makes the story enjoyable for us.

We then went to bed.

